

Region 5 North — 2004

Dan Cole

Raleigh, NC

The tradition of Carolina soaring, begun decades ago in Chester, continues. Veterans and rookies alike are coming to Perry, a town in South Carolina so small you would swear the gas station was it. Airborne, you can see the cluster of homes that make this hamlet. Perry International is picture perfect with a 5,000 ft. long runway, beautiful flowerbeds, and blooming dogwoods. It is the home of Al and Rhonda Tyler, who remind us what true southern hospitality is. They graciously invited a full fleet of 65 pilots for a week of fun and flying. The Tylers show their love for the sport and people of soaring by hosting a contest that has quickly become the first choice of many pilots (87 applications at the preferential entry deadline.)

As contestants showed for the practice days, news of what to come was abuzz — early arrivals had experienced 10,000 foot cloudbases with lift to match and tasks as long as 280 miles. This was an exciting start to what was to become a great week of soaring.

On the first day, with conditions forecast to be blue, there was a bit of anxiety (contest jitters) but every one knew it would turn out good. The 15 Meter was sent on a 205 mi. assigned task, the Open and Standard were given 3 hour turn-area tasks, and the Sports class was assigned a modified assigned task. By the time they were up and ready to go cu were popping everywhere and the jitters went away. The flying was fun during most of the flight but like most days there were some snags. As the pilots got into the area near Orangeburg conditions turned soft and many found themselves low. For the winners the day produced speeds near 70 mph but all pilots had smiles because we knew this was only the beginning.

On Day 2 everyone awoke to cool temperatures and a heavy layer of cirrus. The forecast indicated that things could be soft. The Sports class was given a modified assigned task that kept them close to home, and in the other classes turn-area tasks, 2:30 minimum time, were assigned with lots of stretch. The FAI classes each had a turn to the north that was in blue air, but as they pressed on, they found occasional good lift between very long, smooth glides and were able to get past the first turn without much trouble. Flying back toward Perry and better conditions in the south, some pilots found they had turned too early and would be undertime. This day was the shortest seen in the contest, but many distances were still in excess of 150 miles.

Day 3 turned out in many ways to be one of the trickiest. It started out much better than the previous day with bright sun on the ground early in the morning and temperatures rising rapidly. The forecast looked good with one snag. In central Georgia there was a weak front with some thick clouds moving slowly toward Perry — it would arrive by 5:00. With a cu filled sky, the run to the first turn was a scorcher with some able to fly the 45 miles without turning. From there

the FAI classes had to cross the Savannah River, rarely a desirable option, to Millen. Then it was a race against the clouds to final turns up north. The 15 meter class started late, and many found themselves working what they could under overcast skies trying to get the last turn and eke out a final glide home. Even with the troublesome weather, many speeds were in excess of 60 mph. However, the prize for getting home today was the M&H reception and R5N's world famous chicken-on-a-beer.

The weak front that passed through on Day 3 was gone by Thursday morning, and with no clouds, a brilliant sun, and just enough dew on the grass, we knew today was going to be another good one. The Open and 15-meter classes fly similar tasks with first turns to the north, then to St. George, over to Allendale, then home. The Sports class is given a turn-area task similar to the Open and 15-meter, while the Standard class flies a 3:30 modified assigned task. The conditions are generally good this day with nice clouds throughout the sky. The first turn causes few trouble for most pilots, but as everyone goes toward the southeast, near St. George, things turn soft requiring a definite change in gears. But, as pilots make their way toward Allendale conditions improve, and the run home is a pleasant, long 40+ mile final glide. The winners in the 15-meter and Standard classes manage speed better than 70 mph, while the Open and Sports class winners were a bit slower in the 60's.

Heavy fog the morning of Day 5 promised good soaring and lots of clouds. All tasks were 3:30 with the 15-meter and Sports classes flying modified assigned tasks and the Standard and Opens flying long turn areas. In general, as it has been throughout the contest, conditions were much better down south, but with a long day of flying and lots of miles to cover everyone still got to see a lot of the contest area. The longest task for the day was 282 miles at a speed of nearly 80 mph — not bad for east coast flying. The highlight of the day, however, was the wedding of Phillip and Lynda La Berge with Rev. Charlie Spratt residing. Afterwards, Gary Ward showed up in his Styles 202 for an awe inspiring airshow.

The last day of Region 5 North was as good as all of the rest. Charlie called 3:00 turn-area tasks all around. The Standard class had managed all week to not see Newberry, a northern turnpoint across a rather large lake, so they were sent there with the 15-meter class to show them the way. The trip up and back included a rather large blue hole that had to be crossed twice. Some gained miles near Newberry with the hope that as time passed the hole would disappear. It was not to be, but most managed to glide across making low saves without much trouble. The rest of the task area had good conditions, and as pilots turned their final turns and made their final glide to Perry, I know all were pleased with a truly great week of soaring competition.

Winning in the Open Class was Heinz Weissenbuehler with a perfect 6000 point contest. Dick Butler took first in the 15-meter class, and Dale Kramer won in the Standard class. The Sports class was hotly contested with Karl Striedieck coming out on top.

Hospitality describes Perry best. Splendid southern cooking was the norm. In addition to a gratis welcome dinner there was a low-country boil, barbecued pig, and world-famous chicken-on-a-beer. One night the neighborhood cafe featured steamed oysters. There is no club or commercial operation at Perry but, as they describe it, a loose affiliation of soaring enthusiasts. This group is five or six strong and all make you feel like this is your home port. Good help was recruited including many friends from the Blue Ridge Soaring Society in New Castle, Virginia. Leo Buckley

was the scorer and his wife Pat ran the retrieve phones. Karen Geisinger gathered together an expert gang of tow pilots and with the help of Russell Muschick got everyone airborne in record time.

Al and Rhonda have built a real treasure in their small South Carolina town. A big grass runway surrounded by southern pines, good friends, and good fun are the ingredients for a great contest. If the weather is good, it's even better. I'll say it again — make your plans early because everyone else will too.